

– REMARKS OF MAYOR PAUL D. FRAIM –
UNITED NEGRO COLLEGE FUND LUNCHEON
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11:30 AM

Thank you for that introduction. It's good to be with everyone today for this special occasion, and I'm delighted to extend a warm welcome to our friends from the United Negro College Fund.

Yours is an organization whose purposes are grounded in our national history. Norfolk has a long history, too, so we are glad you are here.

I do want to acknowledge members of city council who are present. Vice Mayor Angelia Williams is here along with council members Paul Riddick, Dr. Teresa Whibley and Alveta Green.

This year the United Negro College Fund celebrates its 70th anniversary. Congratulations on reaching that important milestone. For its 70th year, the Fund has begun a process to reengage local partners in support of its mission of promoting and supporting minority education.

As a part of that effort, a UNCF representative contacted me recently to ask if I would be willing to host a community luncheon to help kick-off the local effort here in Norfolk.

Of course, I was familiar with the Fund . . . knew it had contributed in numerous and important ways to the hopes of young people and, therefore, to our society . . . and – like everyone here – knew its famous motto: “A mind is a terrible thing to waste.”

The decision was an easy one. I was pleased to accept the invitation, and it is an honor – in every respect – to have this opportunity to speak about an organization that has done so much for so many young people.

When the United Negro College Fund was established, in 1944, the country was a very different place than it is today. The Great Depression was over at last, and World War II was winding down. But Jim Crow and the separate but equal doctrine still prevented blacks from exercising the rights of full citizenship in their own country – a country they had fought and died for in every war since the American Revolution.

Think about it.

Shut out of schools, turned away by hospitals, refused admission to business organizations, denied the right to vote or hold public office, unable to live where they

wanted and discriminated against in the workplace . . . in 1944 blacks were effectively isolated from mainstream American society – especially in the South.

Despite these intolerable conditions, they never lost faith in the promise of their country. They were determined to succeed, and if it took creating their own institutions, well then, so be it.

Closer to home, the story behind the founding of what would become Norfolk State University can help us better appreciate the conditions that led to the creation of the UNCF.

It begins in 1932 – during the depths of the Depression – with a conversation between Winston Douglas, principal of Booker T. Washington High School – Norfolk’s black high school - and local black physician John Givens.

Just as it is today, education was seen back then as a means for economic advancement and a road to a better life, and both men believed Norfolk needed a two-year college for blacks. Their opinion was based on two issues - access and affordability – reasons that are once again affecting college enrollment decisions. The nearest black college to Norfolk was Hampton Institute – not too far away today, depending on tunnel traffic. But in 1932 Hampton wasn’t in commuting distance. And attending college elsewhere was too expensive for most to afford.

Douglas and Givens approached the State’s three black colleges – Virginia Union, Virginia State College and Hampton Institute - with the idea for a college in Norfolk. Only Virginia Union was interested. But they faced a high hurdle. Starting a college cost a lot of money, and raising funds during the Depression was just about impossible. But by now the idea had been embraced by the community. The black Norfolk Federation of Parent-Teacher Leagues got behind it, and so did the black churches, businesses and social and fraternal organizations. Support came from similar organizations in Portsmouth.

After three years of work, a way was found to finance the school. Classroom space was secured, educator and Portsmouth native Samuel Fischer Scott was hired as director, and on September 24, 1935 the Norfolk Unit of Virginia Union opened its doors to the first class of students.

Its facilities could not have been more modest. The college consisted of a few rooms on the second and third floors of the Hunton YMCA on East Brambleton Avenue. That did not diminish the fact that this was an enormous achievement, and it generated great pride among Norfolk’s African American citizens. Here’s how Mr. Scott described the first day of classes: “Before we opened the door, we could hear them downstairs. When nine o’clock came, you had a stream of kids all excited. We were excited, too. We knew history was in the making.”

Later he would say how difficult it was to sell people a college with no campus, no faculty and no way to prove its identity. Somehow, they succeeded in doing so.

One of the first students to enroll at the Norfolk Unit of Virginia Union was Saint Paul Langley Epps, a Booker T. Washington High School graduate. For Epps, this was an opportunity that would otherwise have been lost. He simply had no money to go to college somewhere else.

Epps valued this opportunity so much that he worked a paper route delivering the Virginian-Pilot in the morning and The Ledger Dispatch in the evening to help pay his tuition. He also was able to secure a \$25 dollar scholarship from Norfolk's Eureka Lodge – the country's first African American Elks Lodge.

1935 was also the year Frederick D. Patterson became president of Tuskegee University. He succeeded Tuskegee's second president, Robert Russa Moton of Virginia. Tuskegee's first president was another Virginian, Booker T. Washington, Jr. Nine years later - in 1944 - Patterson founded the United Negro College Fund. The UNCF was to be led by blacks working on behalf of black institutions to provide consistent financial support to struggling black colleges and universities. Its mission then, as today, was to support access to higher education for low income African American students.

That same year, the future Norfolk State became a division of Virginia State College. In 1969 it became Norfolk State College. Today, Norfolk State University is among the largest predominantly black colleges and universities in the country. It is a vital institution of higher education for Hampton Roads, and its graduates have gone on to become business and community leaders, scholars, educators and medical professionals.

The story of Norfolk State's founding is surely similar to that of other black colleges, and it reflects the reasons why the United Negro College Fund was established. Like Norfolk State, UNCF is an organization born out of necessity . . . out of deep faith in education's power to ensure economic success . . . and as a way to provide affordable access to higher education for young, aspiring low-income minority students.

As you know so well, the ideal of education in America – broadly and equitably available – was a long time coming in our national history. Fulfillment has only taken shape in my lifetime. In some ways, it is still a work in progress.

At a recent summit on higher education convened by President Obama, it was pointed out that while more than half of college students graduate within six years, the graduation rate for low-income students is around 25%. More specifically, African American college attendance and graduation are much lower than those of other groups.

This is due primarily to three factors:

- The high cost of college;
- African Americans disproportionately do not receive a high school education that adequately prepares them for college; and,
- Lower income levels for African Americans.

Measure that against the fact that, over the past three decades, the median family income of adults – in their principle earning years – increased only for those with a four-year college or an advanced degree.

So in a different way, we're struggling with the same challenges in 2014 that we were in 1944. Attending college is still about access and affordability – especially for minority students – and it's still the surest road to a better life. And that's where the United Negro College Fund continues to play a vital role.

Each year, UNCF provides over \$100 million dollars in financial assistance to more than 60,000 students attending black and non-African American colleges and universities to help them get the education they need - and the nation needs them to have.

Across the country, more than 42% of UNCF students come from homes with incomes less than \$25,000 a year. Many are the first in their family to attend college . . . many students in Norfolk and Hampton Roads fit that profile.

There are students attending college right here in Norfolk – at Old Dominion and Norfolk State universities, and at Eastern Virginia Medical School – who receive financial assistance from UNCF.

The good we secure for ourselves is precarious and uncertain until good is secured for all and woven into the fabric of our community. We need more of our young people to pursue their educations after high school. And we must do better at increasing the number of minority students attending college. The United Negro College Fund has been making that happen for 70 years. There is still a critical need for what they do, for the financial support they provide.

Before her death in 1955, famed black educator, civil rights activist and UNCF co-founder Mary McLeod Bethune wrote “My Last Will and Testament” – a document that was a reflection on her life and legacy and a settling of her estate. In it she says: “I leave you a thirst for education. Knowledge is the prime need of the hour.” And so it is still today.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about an issue important to our city, to our region and to the nation. And when the United Negro College Fund contacts you, please remember its contributions to the futures of young African American students and support their good work.